

# ***Proof***

**directed by Jocelyn Moorhouse**

**Teaching notes prepared for VATE members by  
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## Section 1.

### An introduction to *Proof*

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One of my students remarked that *Proof* has three dysfunctional characters: a blind, suspicious photographer; a toxic, neurotic housekeeper; and an itinerant, irresponsible flirt. She thought Martin's dog, Bill, the most agreeable living creature in the film. Of course, I had to ask why my student thought them dysfunctional and a lively discussion ensued. The temptation to label each character is, of course, to be resisted. The complexities of Martin, Celia and Andy defy these labels but the initial impressions of your students are often a good jumping off point for exploring the film.

*Proof* will reward repeated viewings. It is a seductively ambiguous film which will probably divide the opinions of your class when you are talking about the three protagonists - Martin, Celia and Andy. There doesn't appear to be any character in the film who is entirely blameless. They all have their frailties and they all tug at our sympathies at different moments of the film. There are many readings of the film which can be persuasively argued. I have indicated some of these readings in the perspectives in Section 4 of these notes.

The film is a bit like the collage of photos that Celia constructs of Andy. With its distortions and ambiguities, the collage has a surreal quality. It suggests that there are no eternal truths, no fixed realities which can be captured on film (they are constructions) or which can provide a surrogate reality, as Martin finds out.

The film is subtly layered and fastidiously crafted. Nothing is left to chance. The interview with Jocelyn Moorhouse (see recommended reading) makes clear the lengths that she went to get it right. I am amazed to discover new meanings each time I view the film. Recently, I noticed the way in which Andy connected sexually with the young woman in the waiting room at the vets - a deliberate inclusion to position the viewer's response to Andy as a hot-blooded male. Perhaps my student used this as evidence for the description of Andy.

It is important to explore the lives of each person in the triangular relationship. The viewer is gradually given the pieces of Martin's life through a series of flashbacks. It is his life which we are invited to understand - the physical experience of being blind, the metaphorical blindness, the emotional repression, the mistrust, the reductionist view of the world as series of photographs.

We are also invited to speculate on Celia's background and her motives for remaining with Martin in the face of constant rejection and humiliation. All we get is her comment about being alone and fatherless and having a mother who died prematurely. We know little of Andy's background apart from the fact that he drifts from job to job and he perceives himself as a "black sheep". You will find these gaps in their lives worth exploring in discussion and in written creative responses.

So, it's what is withheld and what we are privileged by the director Jocelyn Moorhouse to see which gives the film its strength. So you should spend some time reflecting on what's excluded as well as on what is included.

Some critics have seen this as bleak film. But it is a film which has humour (eg the drive-in scene; the photograph on the toilet) and a sense of hope and optimism in the renewed Martin as a forgiving and more open and trusting person at the end of the film.

*Proof* is probably the first of a new wave of films dealing with urban, contemporary and multicultural Australian society. Other films which are called “urban- edge” films are the black comedy, *Death in Brunswick*, *The Big Steal*, *Romper Stomper*, *Strictly Ballroom* and *Muriel’s Wedding*. It is interesting to compare these with *Proof*.

*Proof* won seven Australian Film Institute Awards. As well as winning acclaim at the Cannes Film Festival in 1991, it has gained critical praise all over the world.

A number of resources and articles will help you put together your own teaching and learning materials on the film are listed here:

- *Australian Film 1978-1992*, ed. Scott Murray, Oxford University Press 1993, page 322
- *Australia at Cannes*, an overview with discussion of *Proof* by Jan Epstein *Cinema Papers*, no. 84, August 1991 pp 32-3.
- Jocelyn Moorhouse: The Gift of *Proof*, an interview with the writer-director by Jan Epstein, *Cinema Papers*, no. 85, November 1991, pp. 4-14
- *Proof*, a review by Karl Quinn, *ibid*, pp. 59-60
- *Proof*, a review by Peter Galvin, *Filmnews*, August 1991 p.12
- *Reading Films*, Kathy McLean, Nelson 1992
- *A Student Guide to the Film, Proof* Gary Simmons, VATE 1995

**NOTE:** A glossary of film terms has been included in the introductory material to *Inside Stories* - “Approaches to teaching text”. It can be photocopied and distributed to students as a handout.

## Section 2. Ways into the text

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### Before viewing the film

**P**roof will invite you to challenge your students' personal values. They will be invited to judge the actions of the main characters, explore whether they could have or should have pursued alternative courses of action. Students' background, gender, age, range of experiences and values and attitudes will determine their response to the actions of the main characters. Before viewing the film, ask students to write down their definitions of the following:

- |                 |                  |
|-----------------|------------------|
| • Love          | • Cruelty        |
| • Loyalty       | • Equality       |
| • Betrayal      | • Power          |
| • Trust         | • Exploitation   |
| • Reality       | • Guilt          |
| • Self-delusion | • Forgiveness    |
| • Truth         | • Reconciliation |
| • Respect       |                  |

Return to their definitions after they have seen the film and compare them with the definitions that the film presents, although these definitions will not be cut and dried.

The film explores the feelings, thoughts and actions of Martin, blind from birth. His disability has affected every aspect of his world. He has experienced the stigma of blindness which has harmed his self-esteem and his capacity to form enduring relationships with others, especially women. But at times he is so cruel that we find it difficult to take account of his experiences when making judgements about him.

Martin reveals the extent of the stigma when he speaks about not being seen in public with his mother in the 1960s. There was an out-of-sight, out-of-mind mentality. You might get your students to explore how attitudes to blind people have changed, both in terms of social acceptance, but also in terms of the real commitment to equality of opportunity for the blind, especially in the area of education, over the past ten years. It is worth contacting the Victorian School for the Blind for some background reading or inviting a speaker to your school.

There is now a much more enlightened and tolerant attitude towards blind people. There has been a lot more recognition of the talents and their ability to lead the lives that they want to lead. It is also interesting to note that the expression "visually impaired" is used in the 1990s.

It's also important to think about your students' own attitudes and experiences. The temptation to stare or to offer help when it's not needed are some of the reactions, they may have seen. In what circumstances might the behaviour of the "fully abled" person be construed as patronising?

You should get your students to reflect on what it might be like to be blind. They may never have thought about the following questions before, but it is important in determining how they might understand and respond to Martin.

- What would you be deprived of which you can experience and enjoy as a sighted person?
- What difficulties and possible dangers would you face?

- If you were scripting a film about a blind person, what would you include in the film? Would you choose to focus on the achievements of the blind person instead?

The study of film should examine how and why meaning is constructed. As with the study of poetry, form and content should not be separated. It is important to look at these elements of the film which when combined create its meaning.

- selection of the setting
- costumes
- lighting
- facial expressions/body language
- subjective/objective shots
- camera angle
- duration of shots
- editing, sequence of images, cross-cutting
- repetition (repetition of images and dialogue)
- external sounds (music, voice-overs)
- links between the scenes (how one scene echoes or anticipates other scenes)
- casting
- dialogue (key statements made by main characters)

The film-maker plays with all these elements at one time or another to create meaning. The choices that are made about all these elements are quite deliberate and these choices should be the focus of class discussion.

### A few viewing strategies

After the a full screening of the film, it is a good idea to invite students to make their initial responses about what they liked or disliked about the film. At this stage they should fill in the narrative pattern of the film, working through the sequence of events. The segmentation in Section 3 will largely do this for you. They should look at the characters' journeys, how the characters resolve the conflicts in their lives. It is essential to compare the beginning and the end of the film in terms of character development.

Look at the opening sequence of the film and the way it sets up expectations. What is established in this sequence? How are the characters introduced? How are the concerns of the film foreshadowed? How is the narrative started? What judgements is the viewer invited to make? Which characters do you identify with? Further questions to tease out initial responses are included in Section 7.

Another useful viewing strategy is to play sequences without the sound. It will force students to focus on the images and how they are composed and connected. Also use the strategy of "freeze framing", in which the video is paused at key moments of the film and students are asked to comment on framing and composition, and give advice to characters at that moment. These approaches will gradually build students' responses to *Proof*.

## Section 3. Running sheet

1. Street scene	Martin	Martin walks resolutely.
2. Rear of restaurant	Andy, Martin	Andy watches Martin with interest.

3. Martin's house	Martin, Celia	Celia lies in waiting.
4. Martin's house	Martin alone	
5. Flashback	Young Martin	Mother's rejection
6. Restaurant	Andy, Martin	Initial conversation
7. Vet's surgery	Andy	Seeing-eye dog next to Martin.
8. Andy's car	Martin	Martin's story unfolds.
9. Restaurant	Martin	Martin returns photos taken in surgery. Andy describes them.
10. Flashback	Young Martin	
11. Martin's home	Martin, Celia	Celia's birthday.
12. Park	Martin	Bill is missing
13. Restaurant	Martin, Andy	Andy describes photos
14. Drive-in	Martin, Andy	
15. Martin's house	Martin, Andy	Sharing of port and Martin's past.
16. Martin's house	Andy, Celia	Celia puts together the collage of Andy
17. Park	Martin, Celia, Andy	Andy is caught in the middle
18. Martin's house	Martin, Celia, Andy	Celia has picked up photos.
19. Martin's house	Martin, Celia	Martin is photographed on the toilet
20. Concert Hall	Martin, Celia	Beethoven's Fifth Symphony
21. Outside Arts Centre	Martin, Celia	Martin thanks Celia.
22. Celia's home	Martin, Celia	Staged seduction.
23. Celia's car	Martin, Celia	Celia asks Martin if he understands why she has stayed with him
24. Martin's bedroom	Martin	Martin's lament
25. Flashback	Young Martin and his mother	Martin's mother indicates that she will die.
26. Martin's home	Andy, Celia	Mutual curiosity is confirmed
27. Park	Andy, Martin	Andy is drawn into the web
28. Martin's home	Celia, Martin	Celia places incriminating photo under Bill's collar
29. Vet's surgery	Martin and vet	The truth of the photo is revealed.
30. Martin's home	Andy, Celia	Andy and Celia caught out by Martin.
31. Cemetery	Martin	Martin visits his mother's grave
32. Martin's home	Martin, Celia	Celia is dismissed.
33. Restaurant	Andy	Shot of empty table
34. Garden	Martin, Andy	Discussion on "truth"
35. Martin's home	Martin, Andy	Andy describes the photograph of the garden
36. Flashback	Young Martin	A hand reaches to the light

## Section 4. Four perspectives on *Proof*

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Rather than present one perspective on the text, I have provided four perspectives which can form the basis for classroom discussion. The first three perspectives are deliberately sketchy and would need much further exploration. The final one, a student perspective, is reproduced with the permission of Emily Geraghty, a Year 12 student in my VCE English class at University High School in 1996.

### a. A feminist perspective.

A feminist reading of *Proof* would rather view Celia as the victim in the film. Many of the reviews of the film that you read will view Martin as the victim. He is often seen as a victim of his disability and his fixed memories. These should not be excuses for his shabby treatment of Celia.

Martin can be seen as a misogynist, a male who at best fears women and at worst, loathes women. Martin reveals to Andy, "Celia has no heart. ... She's a vile woman. I hate her." His malicious treatment of a woman who loves him so profoundly, who will go to any lengths to spark a response in him, is indefensible. Martin's distrust of women stems from his belief that his mother has lied to him as a young boy. This carries over into his punishment of Celia. Celia is humiliated consistently. The link between the mother and Celia is clearly established in the film.

Celia's ostensible malice is not motivated by the sort of dark impulses that can be attributed to Martin. Through his indifference and his cruelty, Martin torments her and forces her to go to the lengths that she does. He denies her what she wants so that she cannot feel pity for him. Instead he can pity her. She is clearly the victim. Even her relationship with Andy is engineered to make Martin jealous, to make him reveal his heart.

The closest that she gets to striking an emotional cord in Martin, is at the Concert Hall. Her tears as she watches Martin experience the passion of Beethoven's music, her rescue of Martin as he stumbles in the night after he has rejected her sexual advances and her gentle kissing of Martin on her dismissal reveal a woman who has sacrificed her own needs to those of Martin. The pathos of Celia is tangible in both these scenes. Yet he is intractable in his refusal to let her into his life.

Three and a half years of serving Martin dutifully and loving him unreservedly count for nothing. Her expulsion at the end of the film and Martin's subsequent taking of Andy into his confidence underlines the view that the film endorses the male world.

### b. A psychoanalytic perspective.

This is probably the most popular reading of *Proof*. This kind of reading invites the viewer to delve into Martin's past and his childhood experiences to look for clues which will explain his adult attitudes and values.

Martin's formative experiences are certainly crucial in his psyche and persona as an adult. The impact of his non-existent relationship with his father and his troubled relationship with his mother need to be explored.

The cause and effect which the flashbacks underline reveal that Martin is trapped by his belief that his mother has lied to him and has abandoned him. These beliefs are inseparable from his literal inability to see the "truth". These mistaken beliefs are nourished by Martin to the point that his entire adult life is marked by a profound distrust of others, especially women.

In this sense, Martin is the victim of his own past. His fixed idea of his perceived unhappy relationship his mother carries over into his relationship with Celia, who has strong emotional and physical links with his mother. One such visual link in the film is the recurring image of breasts. As a child he is chastised by his mother for innocently touching her breasts. Celia offers Martin her breasts but Martin recoils in horror. A psychoanalytic reading of the film invites you to explore these links. You should look for other links between Martin's mother and Celia, between his past and the present. You might like to explore Celia as a mother figure to Martin as she cleans his house and prepares his favourite meals. There is the suggestion in this reading that Andy and Celia's sexual encounter, certainly from Celia's point of view, is a vicarious sexual encounter with Martin.

#### c. A gay perspective.

It is probably easy to be dismissive of this reading. However, some critics have argued that there is a latent sexual connection between Martin and Andy. They have looked at the scene in which Martin invites Andy in for a drink which, while on the surface is harmless enough, is charged with the taboo nature of intimate gestures between Australian males.

When Andy is buying some food at the drive-in kiosk, Martin runs his fingers over the objects in Andy's car. This can be read as Martin wanting to know Andy more fully, but Martin's awkwardness and sexual diffidence pull him back from direct contact with Andy.

Take a close look at the first time Martin asks Andy to describe the photos for him, There is a real nervousness and tension in Martin, which can be construed as his initial need for Andy's affection. It is also interesting to note that Martin's repugnance of Celia's sexual overtures is unequivocal. You might like to focus on the scenes in which Martin and Andy are together in exploring this reading further.

#### d. A student perspective.

The film *Proof* is essentially about Martin's painful passage towards healing. The film presents the viewer with a portrait of a lonely man, scarred by a perceived rejection by his mother when he was a child. This perception accentuated his vulnerability as a blind person, and he withdraws into himself. As an adult, Martin refuses to accept anything on faith, but must clinically, methodically prove it by photography and labelling the photographs in Braille. By collecting proof, he believes that he can know the truth; that what Martin senses is what others see.



Martin is involved in a psychologically painful, almost sado-masochistic relationship with his housekeeper, Celia. She is a mother figure, cleaning and cooking for him, Martin also rejects her as he believed his mother rejected him. Martin turns Celia's love for him around, using it against her. "She wants me," he tells Andy, and, "if I can continue to deny her what she wants she can never feel pity for me. Instead I can pity her." In punishing Celia, Martin is punishing his mother. And the links between the two women are clearly drawn in the way in which Moorhouse uses lips and breasts to underline the similarities between his mother and Celia.

In his relationship with Celia, unlike in his relationship with his mother, it is Martin who is in the position of power. As he turns his camera on to those who can see, changing from victim to controller, he turns Celia's love in on her, forcing her to extremes in her obsessions (her shrine of photographs in her own home) and in her machinations (the seduction of Andy). Martin has substituted power for love and trust, divorcing himself from his world in order to control it.

Martin has cut himself from emotion - from trust - to save himself from the hurt he experienced as a boy. He believed that his mother was too ashamed of his blindness to take him out, and that she lied to him in the daily descriptions of the garden outside their flat. When asked whether it "... really matter(ed) if she lied ... about the garden ...", he replies, "It was my world." Martin's adult life is based upon this early uncertainty. Having no way of knowing whether his mother was lying to him, he could not trust her - even to the point of doubting her death. As a result, he lived in an alien and frightening world.

Yet, by the end of the film, Martin has changed, and ironically, it is partly through a further betrayal that he gains this healing. Martin makes friends with a young man, Andy, who describes his photographs for him. They talk, they go out together, and gradually become comfortable with one another. Because Andy is so undemanding, accepting and easy to be with, Martin comes to love him.

"I trust you Andy," he tells him. It is not until Andy betrays Martin, by sleeping with Celia, and lying about one of Martin's sacred photographs which incriminates the lovers, that Martin is truly healed. Martin has an opportunity to reject Andy for his betrayal; to retreat to his cold, controlled world from one which has seemed to punish him for trusting. But although his life has been a search for truth, Martin has never lived the truth that he so worshipped. Finally as Celia demanded, he stopped the "game playing" and faced the "truth". Andy's betrayal jolts Martin out of his narrow world, forcing him to examine his relationships with Andy and Celia. Finally he attains a true understanding of the world around him: that nothing can be verified absolutely, that friendship is imperfect, as is life.

Perhaps Martin finally accepts his blindness as an uncontrollable part of himself, and has abandoned his narrow concept of truth and reality. "I'm a blind man," Martin reproaches Andy, "You can't know how important truth is to me." It is Andy's bitter reply that - metaphorically - opens Martin's eyes to the real truth, that "Everybody lies. But not all the time and that's the point." Andy tells Martin, "You tell the truth ... Your whole life's the truth. Have some pity on the rest of us."

Finally, it is Martin's acceptance of Andy's weaknesses - and his own - that change him. With his new perception of life, with trust and love, Martin no longer needs the cold power he has over Celia to protect himself. Finally he is able to say, "I'm sorry I tormented you for so long", and releases her.

## **Section 5.**

## Style, Setting, Structure and Soundtrack

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**T**he film does not conform to a specific genre. It has elements of a range of film types: the film labelled the melodrama of affliction (a film in which a disabled and disadvantaged hero rises above the odds); the “buddy” film which explores the bonds between males usually at the expense of a female; and the social realist genre which explores a significant social issue (in *Proof*, the rights of the disabled). It also has some of the features of the “film noir” movement of the 1940s and 1950s: gloomy, shadowy sets, established throughout by the use of low-key lighting, hide the faces, rooms, urban landscapes and by extension, mirrors shadowy characters and their motivations (note how Celia seems to control the light in Martin’s house). Much of the film is set indoors; the outdoor settings are wintry.

It is important to understand the shifts in time which occur in the film. There are four flashbacks in which Martin re-constructs the past. He remembers particular moments in his life as a young boy. In all cases there is a visual or a conversational link with the present. The first flashback follows Martin and Celia’s meeting. In Celia, there is a reminder of his mother. In punishing Celia, Martin is punishing his mother. This flashback reveals the hand reaching out and the touching of Martin’s mother’s face neck and breasts. “You can’t touch people whenever you like. Fingers, they aren’t the same as eyes”. The young Martin is chastised and we receive the first glimpse of the way his perception of his mother colours his whole life. The second flashback occurs after Martin has urged Andy never to lie to him. Andy replies incredulously, “Why would I do that?” The flashback starts with a close-up of Martin’s mother’s lips. This also deliberately echoes the start of the next scene in which we see Celia applying her lipstick. His mother is training Martin to listen for the outside sounds. Martin accuses his mother of lying to him about what can be heard outside. She asks, “Why would I do that?” Martin’s reply is, “Because you can.” The links are self-evident and should be explored in the context of the difficulties Martin has in trusting others.

The third flashback occurs after the attempted seduction scene. Martin lies on his bed and recalls the moment when his mother tells him she is going to die soon. Martin’s outburst (“You’re only saying that to get away from me ..... You’re not telling the truth. You never do .... I’ll never believe you”) reveals the depth of his mistrust. This is immediately followed up with the young Martin knocking on the coffin and pronouncing, “It’s hollow”. The fourth flashback is dealt with in Section 6.

Earlier, I referred to the elements of film which when combined make the meaning of the film. While you should avoid isolating these elements, it is important to consider how each element contributes to the overall meaning and mood of the film. The soundtrack is important. There seem to be three distinct musical scores which underline particular parts of the narrative. There is the unnerving, almost sinister musical background to moments in the film when another dark twist to the plot occurs. It echoes the mind ticking over, when a new development in the plot creates disquiet in a character. There is the gentle sound of the piano and the French horn taking us into the past. There is the toe-tapping, light-hearted music which accompanies the first scene at the vets and at the drive-in. At the other end of the scale, there is the absolute silence in the park when Martin calls Bill. This silence allied with the quick succession of various shots of the park creates a moment of intense discomfort.

### Section 6.

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# A guided approach to selected excerpts

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## Scenes 1- 3. First impressions: meeting Martin, Andy and Celia

The opening of *Proof* will provide you with a glimpse of the personal characteristics of the main characters.

When looking at the opening sequence of the film look at the way it sets up expectations. Here are some general questions that are worth considering:

- What is established in this sequence?
- How are the characters introduced?
- How are the concerns of the film foreshadowed?
- How is the narrative started?
- What judgements is the viewer invited to make?
- Which characters do you identify with?

How our curiosity about each of the characters is aroused is interesting to note. Martin strides rather than walks, not stopping to apologise to pedestrians he has bumped into. Perhaps this signifies his single-mindedness. He has to get from one point to another with as little fuss as possible. Andy is seen watching him. Andy's curiosity becomes our curiosity as the camera gives us his point of view. Andy has an open, honest face. The choice of actors has been deliberate in both cases.

The rain establishes a particular atmosphere. The rain lashing the window at the end of the film is part of the film's symmetry.

The editing of this sequence is important in determining how the viewer receives Celia. We get a glimpse of her sitting silently, smugly; she is comfortable and knowing in Martin's lounge. There is a need to think about the order of the shots after we see Martin come through the door and the effect that this creates. We see Martin from Celia's point of view, the ashtray and cigarette framed on one side of the shot. There is a need to consider Celia's appearance, her manner, her contribution to the conversation. Why do we see her in close-up? What feelings do these close-ups betray? Martin's responses are curt. How does the opening provide the viewer with a microcosm of the conflict between Martin and Celia?

## Scene 17. Caught in the middle.

This scene is pivotal. Andy is irreversibly drawn into the tangled web of relationships. He is literally caught in the middle. The way in which this scene is structured is worth noting. I would suggest a shot by shot analysis of the editing in this scene. Draw up a page then number and describe each shot. The camera certainly does a lot of work in this short scene. Apart from Martin calling Bill there is no dialogue in the scene.

It is interesting to note the relaxed mood that the director establishes. We see a bike rider, people picnicking or exercising their dogs. This mood is in direct contrast to the tensions that Andy will experience in the next few minutes.

Like Andy, we expect Bill to run up to him. Suddenly a previous scene makes sense. This is the scene in which Martin is momentarily panic-stricken when Bill fails to come to his call. The editing of this scene is so adept in capturing the tug of war

being waged by Celia. Several close-ups of Celia, one of which is a kind of victor's smile, interspersed with a close-up of Andy which expresses his bewilderment at her actions and a long shot of Martin (from Andy's perspective) innocently snapping photographs, propels the narrative decisively. Andy doesn't know which way to look. The chance photograph that Martin takes of Andy fleeing the camera's lens is the final step in his entanglement.

There is also a wonderful example of how the camera can control the narrative at the start of the next scene which echoes the way in which Andy has been caught in the middle. Celia enters Martin's house to find Martin and Andy together. The camera this time frames her standing between them.

## **Scene 20. At the concert hall.**

I think this is the most moving scene in the film. It captures a rare moment in the lives of both Celia and Martin. Our previous impressions of both of them as emotional minnows are subverted. Martin, is immersed fully in the passion of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Celia closely watches Martin for his reactions. She gets what she had hoped to achieve by bringing him here. As Martin experiences the vigorous cadences of the music, the camera pans across all the sections of the orchestra. Perhaps this is Martin aurally sensing all the instruments in the symphony.

He removes his glasses (one of the few times in the film that he does), visibly moved by the power of the symphony as he places his hand on his chest. Celia's tears flow at the sight of a Martin she has never seen before. We lose sight of all her previous smugness and the accompanying smirks. She cuts a contrite and vulnerable figure. The bravado and string-pulling power have gone. I think we see the real Celia at this moment.

The games, the psychological warfare have momentarily disappeared. Martin thanks Celia for "an experience he'll never forget". Martin, too, lets down his guard momentarily. Perhaps there was a chance for both of them. It would be a good idea to get students to discuss the placement of this scene, given that it precedes the staged seduction scene.

## **Scene 37. Reaching for the light.**

When looking at the closing moments of the film reflect on the way in which any conflict has been resolved and the ways in which characters have made discoveries about themselves.

Immediately prior to the final flashback, Andy has described the photograph that Martin has taken of the garden as a boy. Andy tells Martin of the bird bath, and the man raking the leaves, the same description given by Martin's mother at the time. For all of Martin's life he has harboured the belief that his mother had lied to him. His belief that photographs could replace his eyes has been a fallacy which has blinkered his whole life.

When Andy explains that the man in the photograph has a "kind" face, he adds that, "maybe it's just the photo". Photographs can be read in different ways.

You need to explore the final flashback as it is part of the tantalising ambiguity of the film. A window rattles. The rain teems. The young Martin's hand moves towards the

window. It is all part of the symmetry of the film, echoing the opening flashback. His hand on the window, the rain stops. Birds sing. There is an intense light. Perhaps this is Martin reconstructing his memory, based on his new understanding of the photograph just described by Andy. He is able to hear what's outside. In the earlier flashback he had been unable to or unwilling to hear when his mother asked him to listen for the raking of leaves. He still can't hear the raking of the leaves but perhaps he is finally able to trust the word of his mother.

## Section 7.

### Topics for discussion and writing

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#### Questions for initial responses

1. What ideas, themes and issues did *Proof* explore? How were they explored?
2. How did the narrative structure of the film work to support its ideas? Is the text linear? Do we have to fill in gaps? If so, what are those gaps? (*Proof* is an interesting text in this regard)
3. How does the physical setting and the cultural context work in the text to develop its themes and ideas?
4. Which characters are drawn sympathetically? Do they change? Are any of the characters stereotyped? Polarised? Do we feel ambivalent about them?
5. What values seem to be transmitted in the text by the director, Jocelyn Moorhouse? How were being positioned by *Proof*?
6. How did your values match those of the film? Were your values challenged?

#### *Proof* across the CATs and work requirements

It is important to use the texts in Year 12 English as possible catalysts for work in other CATs and work requirements. Here are some suggestions on how you might use the ideas that *Proof* raises with specific CATs and work requirements in mind.

##### a. Presentation of an issue

Many issues in the Australian media tend to be recycled regularly. This shouldn't be seen as the media trivialising issues. Some issues are very difficult to resolve. One such issue is the sexual rights of the disabled. In 1994 SBS television ran "Untold Desires", a powerful documentary on the sexuality and sexual rights of the disabled.

Crusaders for the rights of the disabled have argued strongly and cogently that sexuality is not just the preserve of the "able". There has been a view that the disabled don't have the same sexual needs as the "fully-abled" and that the disabled have been expected to either ignore or sublimate their sexual desires. This will no doubt raise a great deal of discussion in your classroom even if you don't find that there has been a lot of current coverage in the media.

## b. Writing folio

Students should be aware of range in audience, purpose, context and form in their writing. Here are some writing which grow out of a study of *Proof*.

1. Project yourself into life as a blind person. Write a personal narrative.
2. Watch another film which explores the life of a person who lives with a disability. Some possibilities are *My Left Foot*, *Children of a Lesser God*, *Coming Home* or *Annie's Coming Out*. Write a review of the film.
3. Conduct an interview with a person who has worked with the blind. Write up the interview for the school newspaper.

## c. Text response

### Short responses

1. Is Martin blind in more ways than one?
2. What are the levels of meaning in the title of the film?

### Extended responses

1. "Celia is hardly the villain. If she is guilty of anything it's that she simply loves Martin too much." Do you agree?
2. *Martin: I'm a blind man. You can't know how important truth is to me.*  
*Andy: Everybody lies, but not all the time and that's the point.*  
  
"Martin's preoccupation with the truth has been his downfall." Discuss
3. "The strength of *Proof* is the way in which the viewer is never given the full story of each of the characters." Do you agree?
4. "Moorhouse forces the viewer to empathise with characters that we instinctively dislike." Is this a fair criticism?
5. "All of the characters in *Proof* are afraid of facing reality." Do you agree?
6. The camera lens is Martin's way of controlling his world. Moorhouse uses a similar technique to control the viewer's response to the characters in *Proof*. Discuss.
7. "*Proof* celebrates mateship and paints a cynical picture of romantic liaisons." Is this the message that Moorhouse intends to convey?

8. You are Celia. As well as taking photographs of Martin you have kept a diary of your thoughts and feelings about Martin. You write an detailed entry the day after your evening with Martin at the concert hall and at your place.
9. You are Andy. Prior your final visit to see Martin, you write a letter to Martin (which you never send) in which you attempt to explain your actions.
10. You are Martin. You decide to write your autobiography after you have learned that your mother had not mislead you. Write about your newly acquired feelings towards your mother.

### **Oral presentation**

Choose some salient moments in the film when you would like to have given a character some sound advice. This might entail choosing moments when you think that a character has acted unfairly or cruelly to another character. In pairs have a friend or partner take on the role of the particular character, justifying their actions. You be the person giving the advice, presenting another possible course of action.